

## Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in Barrow, Alaska

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### Abstract

The Inupiat of Northwest Alaska have a more than 1,000 year history of bowhead whale hunting, and they retain an identity as a whaling people, or "people of the whales". This paper describes the characteristics and significance of whaling activities, whaling groups, and the sharing and distribution of the bowhead whale products among the contemporary Inupiat in Barrow, Alaska. It is concluded that the whaling tradition of the Inupiat is essential for their continued cultural and social identity.

## 1. Introduction

The Inupiat live in Northwest Alaska, where those along the coast began to hunt bowhead whales around the 10th century. Thus for more than a 1,000 years whaling has formed the social and economic basis of Inupiat society (Jensen 2012; Savelle 2005; Sheehan 1997), who even now are identified as the “people of the whales” (Sakakibara 2010).

Global anti-whaling movements increasingly threaten the continuation of all categories of whaling, including indigenous (aboriginal) subsistence whaling (as defined by the International Whaling Commission [IWC]), as well as other types, such as beluga and dolphin hunting. Because of the resultant “whaling problem”, many anthropologists encounter increasing difficulties in obtaining research permits from indigenous whaling communities. As a consequence, they seldom carry out anthropological research in them (Kishigami 2011). However, with the permission of the Barrow Whaling Captains Association, I began a research project on Inupiat whaling in Barrow, Alaska in 2006.

This paper describes the characteristics and significance of whaling activities, whaling groups, and the sharing and distribution of the bowhead whale products among the contemporary Inupiat in Barrow, Alaska.

## 2. History of Whaling in Alaska and Barrow

### 2.1 History and the Current Status of Whaling

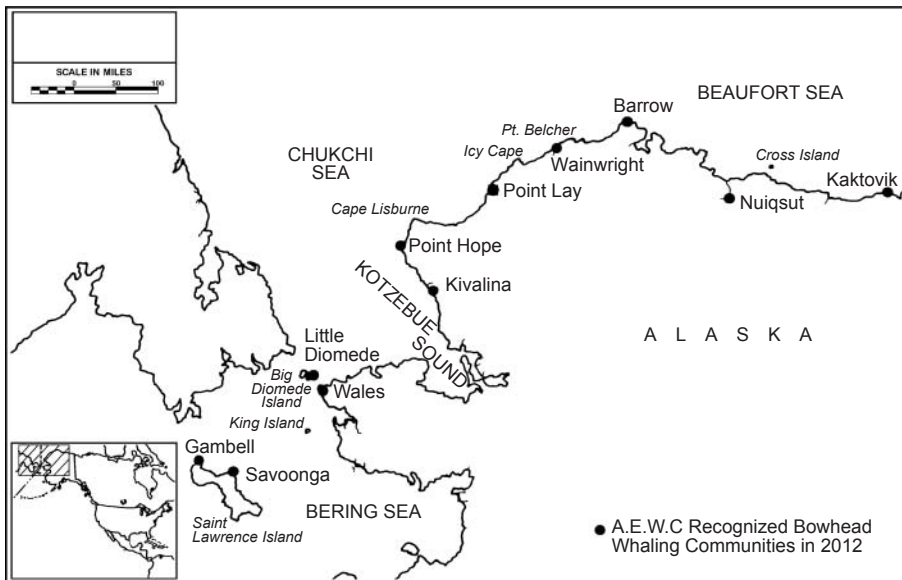
Large whales, such as the bowhead, were scavenged and/or began to be hunted by coastal people in Northwest Alaska approximately 2,000 years ago. However, it is estimated that intensive whaling dates from around the 10th Century AD, or slightly before (Savelle 2005: 55). The whaling people formed a distinctive lifestyle known as the “Thule culture”, and spread to Greenland within 300 years, presumably under conditions of climate warming. However, owing to a climate cooling that peaked around the 16th/17th century, apart from beluga and narwhal hunting whaling was seldom conducted in the Arctic after that date, except in Alaska and Greenland.

The whaling culture in Northwest Alaska changed with the beginning of commercial whaling in the Arctic Ocean in 1848. Several Inupiat were employed as crew members on commercial whaling ships, and others were hired as laborers in coastal whaling bases. Also, whaling ships, and later trading ships, traded guns, metal tools, liquor, glass beads, and clothing to the Inupiat and Yupiit for baleen, walrus tusks, and furs of marine and terrestrial mammals. Although guns and metal tools contributed to increasing the efficiency of Inupiat and Yupiit hunting and fishing, unaccustomed consumption of liquor caused conflict among them. Also, the spread of tuberculosis and measles through contact with Euro-Americans and others resulted in decreasing populations and weakened their society socially and economically. Furthermore, the American whalers caught approximately 16,594 whales from 1848 to 1914 in the Arctic Ocean (Bockstoce *et al.* 2005: 4, 6). As a result, whale populations decreased drastically. Together, these factors had substantial negative influences on Inupiat and Yupiit whaling (Bockstoce 2009).

The Inupiat and Yupiit harvested approximately 11 bowhead whales a year from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1970s (Gambell 1983: 467). After that, their harvest increased to about 30 a year and the number of whales struck and lost also increased. Worried about depletion of the bowhead stock, in 1977 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) banned the bowhead whale hunt of the Inupiat and Yupiit (Hamaguchi 2002: 28).

In response to the IWC ban, in August, 1977, ten Inupiat and Yupiit villages formed the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC), and began lobbying the US government against the ban. The result was that in 1978 the IWC granted the Alaskan Inupiat and Yupiit an annual catch of 12 whales or 18 strikes. This quota system for bowhead subsistence whaling was officially introduced by the IWC in 1979. In 1981, the AEWC began co-management of the bowhead whales with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Currently, the Inupiat and Yupiit in Alaska hunt bowhead whales as “Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling” under the IWC, which defines “Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling” as being “...for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial, social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and on the use of whales” (IWC 1981). The Alaskan Inupiat and Yupiit are allowed to catch up to 280 bowhead whales for the five years from 2008 to 2012 by the IWC. As 25 of the whales are transferred to the Chukchi and Yupiit in Russia, the Alaskan indigenous peoples may catch about 51 whales per year.



Map 1 Alaska aboriginal whaling villages (Source: Braund and Moorehead 1995: 255)

The whaling villages in Alaska include nine Inupiat villages (Little Diomedea, Wales, Kivalina, Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, Barrow, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik), and two Yupiit villages (Gambell and Savoonga). My research location is Barrow, where whalers catch about 20 bowhead whales almost every year. Barrow, the northernmost town in the USA, is located at of 71° 29' N and 156° 79' W (see Map 1).

## 2.2 Barrow, Alaska

The USA purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. The US army established a meteorological and magnetic research station near Barrow in 1881, the Cape Smythe Whaling and Trading Station was built there in 1893, and the Presbyterian Church was established in 1899. Exploration of the Naval Petroleum Reserve Number 4 began in 1946, and the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory was established there in the same year. Alaska was strategically very important during World War II as well as during the Cold War, with a DEW line base activated near Barrow in 1957. Since many Inupiat gathered to live around these facilities, Barrow was recognized as an administrative community in 1958.

In 1968, oil was discovered by the ARCO and Humble companies in Prudhoe Bay, to the east of Barrow. In 1969, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) applied to the US Department of the Interior to construct a hot-oil pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Prince William Sound. However, native land claims had to be settled before construction of the pipeline could begin. Thus, the indigenous peoples in Alaska negotiated with the US Federal and Alaska State governments concerning land rights. As a result, the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed on December 18, 1971. Based on this Act, 12 Regional Native Corporations were created, and the Alaskan natives received 44 million acres of land and compensation of US\$ 962.5 million. When the North Slope Borough was formed in 1972, Barrow became its political and economic center.

Because of job opportunities, Barrow has a much larger population of non-Inupiat people than other communities in the Borough. There were about 1500 jobs in Barrow in 2003. About 57% of workers are civil servants and some 43% work in the private sector. Like many other Arctic villages, the economic system of Barrow has both market and subsistence sectors.

According to the 2010 census, the total population of Barrow was 4, 974 of which 65.0% was Inupiat, 16.0% Euro-American, and 19.0% others, including immigrants from the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, and elsewhere (North Slope Borough 2012a). The number of households in Barrow in 2012 was 1,507, with an average of 3.3 persons per household.

According to the 2010 census, the average annual household and individual incomes of the Inupiat in Barrow were \$75,215 and \$20,339, respectively (North Slope Borough 2012b). Two hundred and one (53%) of 414 Inupiat households earned more than US \$60,000 a year (North Slope Borough 2012c), indicating that the Inupiat have a relatively high income in Barrow. On the other hand, the unemployment rate of all ethnicities is 25.7 % in Barrow (North Slope Borough 2012d).

### 3. Annual Cycle of Whaling Activities in Barrow

Most Inupiat adults engage in wage labor throughout the year, and carry out their hunting and fishing activities on weekends, holidays, and between work shifts. Many of the Inupiat hunters engage in the bowhead whale hunts for a few weeks each of spring and fall, when these whales migrate offshore near Barrow. This whaling is one of the greatest concerns among the Inupiat in Barrow.

The typical annual cycle of whaling activities in Barrow is as follows. In February, each crew planning to go spring whaling repair the skin cover of the whaling boat (*umiaq*) or make a new cover. In making the new skin cover, 8 to 10 women sew about 6 bearded seal skins in one day. After boat preparations are complete, in March crews clean the ice cellar used to store whale meat and *maktak*. That remaining from the previous year is removed and given to any needy villagers.

From late-March to early-April, several crews co-operatively make a number of trails from Barrow to their camping bases at the edge of the sea ice. Then, using snowmobiles they transport their boats, hunting gear and camping equipment to the camping bases. In late-April or early-May, they start to hunt whales and continue whaling until late-May. Once a whale is caught, a crew butchers and shares it with other crews and individual helpers on the sea ice. One or two days after the butchering, each successful whaling captain hosts a feast at their own houses for the whole community.

In late-May or early-June, each of the successful captains hosts an “*Appugauti*” feast at the shore in Barrow. Then, either of each individually or a few to several captains in cooperation carry out “*Nalukataq*” festivals in late-June. Successful whaling crews go goose and duck hunting soon after the whaling ceases, to prepare for these feasts. The games are held at each captain’s ice cellars.

The “*Appugauti*” is a feast for the whole community held at the end of each successful crew’s spring whaling season. Each successful whaling captain hosts it, and provides “*mikigak*” (fermented meat) and duck soup and goose soup to residents in Barrow (Kishigami 2011). From mid-June to the end of the month, several “*Nalukataq*” festivals are hosted by successful whaling captains. In these events, whale meat, *maktak* and other dishes are provided to the whole community, in addition to participating in the blanket toss and Inupiat drum dances.

From July to September, each captain and his crew prepare for the fall whale hunt as well as hunting for bearded seals, the skins of which are used to make the following year’s boat covers.

In late-September or early-October, when snow begins to cover the ground, bowhead whales pass off-shore near Barrow, during their southern migration. To harvest these the whalers use metal boats with outboard engines, and leave town every morning and return each evening. More than 30 boats go whaling almost every day during this season. When caught, a whale is towed by several co-operating boats to the butchering site near Barrow. Each whale is butchered and shared in the same manner as during the spring hunt. Also, each successful captain hosts the community feast at his house. But there are no festivals with feasts, such as “*Apugauti*” or “*Nalukataq*”, during the fall whaling season.

Each year successful boat captains give meat and *maktak* for feasts on Thanksgiving Day in November, and at Christmas. Also, a Messenger Feast is held intermittently every two years, in which Barrow people invite many people from neighboring villages. The whaling captains and hunters donate whale meat, *maktak*, caribou meat, and other products to the feasts.

In this way, the annual cycle of Barrow centers on whaling and associated activities (Kishigami 2007, 2009a; Sakakibara 2010; Worl 1980).

#### 4. Contemporary Whaling in Barrow

The Inupiat hunt bowhead whales in the spring and fall when the whales pass close to the shore off Barrow. Under the quota system, Barrow whalers were allowed up to 22 whales a year from 2008 to 2012 (see Table 1).

##### 4.1 Social Organization and Management of Whaling

A “crew” is a whaling unit usually composed of a captain, his wife, and about 5 to 15 hunters and their wives. There are approximately 55 registered crews in Barrow in 2012.

The core of each whaling crew is a whaling captain, who owns an *umiaq*, a boat with outboard engines, an ice cellar(s), several vehicles, and hunting equipment, together with his wife, who prepares clothing and food and manages financial and social matters. The couple is responsible equally for raising money for hunting as well as the management of crew matters. The crew composition is not fixed, and may change slightly every year. This social unit carries out whaling activities, feasts, and festivals under the supervision of the captain and his wife.

According to research conducted in the mid-1980s, each crew used to be composed of members of a captain’s extended family (Worl and Smythe 1986: 284). However, after the quota system was introduced by the IWC in 1978, each extended family began to send their members to different whaling crews. Using this strategy, each extended family was able to obtain whale meat and *maktak* from the hunt (Bodenhorn 2003). Thus, each crew came to include more non-relatives than previously.

During my research in Barrow from 2006 to 2012, several crews maintained essentially the same membership, whereas others underwent slight changes. Three examples of the social composition of the whaling crew in Barrow are shown below.

**Table 1** Number of whales caught in Barrow from 2005 to spring of 2012  
(total number of whales caught in spring and fall hunts in each year)

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Spring	16	3	13	9	4	14	7	14
Fall	13	19	7	12	15	8	11	10
Total	29	22	20	21	19	22	18	24

Source: (Suydam *et al.* 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) and information from Department of Wildlife Department, North Slope Borough

The first case is a whaling crew whose captain H.A. (▲) is in his early-40s (see Figure 1). This crew is composed of a captain, his wife, his son, his brother-in-law, a nephew, a distant cousin, and two grandsons. Its core is the captain and his nephew during whale hunting.

Figure 2 shows the social composition of crew 2, of which captain L.B. is in his early-40s. This group is composed of the captain, his wife, two sons, his daughter's boyfriend, a nephew (his sister's son), a brother-in-law (another sister's husband), and three sons of that brother-in-law. The core members of this group are the captain, his sons and brother-in-law.

The third case is a whaling crew of which the captain, E.B., is in his 60s. This group is made up of the captain, his wife, two sons, a grandson, two brothers, a nephew, and cousin and his son, a distant relative, and a non-relative. The core members of this group are the captain and his sons and brothers, and a cousin. The unrelated hunter and the captain are long-standing friends who grew up together in Barrow (see Figure 3).

These examples show that the core members of these three groups are in father-son, brother, or cousin relationships, although the groups include distant relatives and non-relatives. A person hoping to join a particular crew whose captain is not a close kinsman or family member must obtain permission to join the crew from the whaling captain and/or the captain's wife. On the other hand, a person wishing to leave a whaling crew may depart of his own volition at any time. The social composition and size of a whaling crew may change over time, depending on the age and generation of the captain, and character and experience of the captain and his wife.

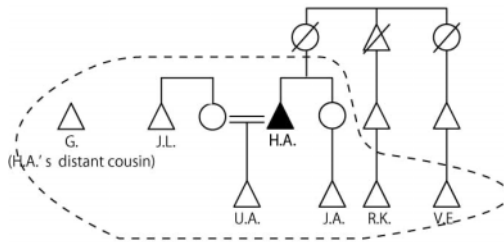


Figure 1 Social composition of A crew (Case 1)

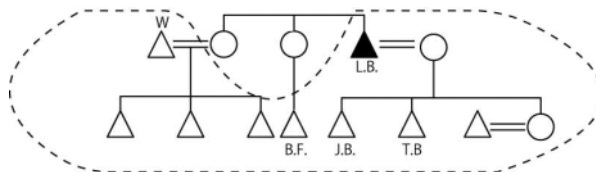
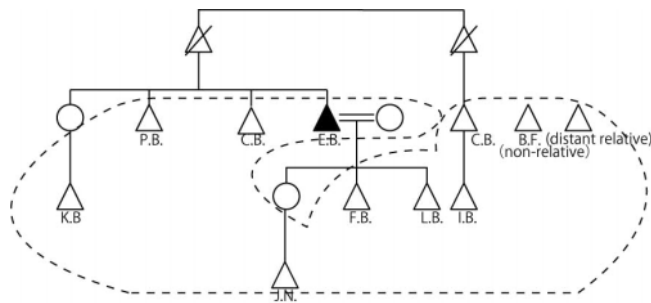


Figure 2 Social composition of B crew (Case 2)





**Figure 3** Social composition of C crew (Case 3)

A whaling captain and his wife are responsible for whaling activities and lives of their crew. Generally, the couple is obliged to provide food, clothing and hunting equipment to crew members in need of them. On the other hand, crew members, and often their families, must help the captain and his wife prepare for the whaling activities and feasts.

A captain and wife of good character and with experience attract many hunters for their crew. Recently, many people have opined that the authority and influence of a whaling captain has generally decreased. This might have been caused by two factors. The first is that hunters nowadays have a wider choice of whaling crews to join, owing to the increased number of crews (from approximately 30 to 55) in Barrow over the last three decades (Braund, Marquette, and Bockstoce 1988: 12–13). The second factor is that recently several hunters (crew members) also pay for some costs of the whaling, even though the boat captain and his wife are supposed to shoulder all.

Usually, a whaling captain's wife stays in the community and assists him in monetary management and other preparations during the whaling seasons. Because it is thought that she attracts bowhead whales, a wife plays a very important symbolic role in attracting them to the whaling crew. She must be generous to everybody and act kindly and gently toward other people. Because the whale is believed capable of recognizing human beings, it will give itself to a good captain and his wife (Bodenhorn 1990).

Several whaling captains have co-captains to assist in the management of whaling.

Each crew requires from US \$10,000–\$30,000 as operating costs for spring whaling, and about US \$5,000–\$10,000 for fall whaling. If a captain hopes to buy new equipment, such as outboard engines, a new boat, and/or snowmobiles, he may need more than \$50,000 (Kishigami 2009a: 515; see Table 2).

Because a whaling crew cannot make money from their bowhead whale hunts, except through selling baleen, a whaling captain and his wife must save money from their wages and dividends from the Arctic Regional Slope Corporation, Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation, the state of Alaska, etc. to cover the costs of the whale hunts. Although an old and experienced whaling captain and his wife tend to pay for all the expenses of the whaling and associated activities, a young captain and his wife tend to

**Table 2** Price and cost list of whaling equipments and tools needed by a whaling captain in Barrow (source: information from Herman Ahsoak in September, 2008)

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* Umiak	
	A wooden frame \$2,000
	Cover (5 or 6 bearded seal skins) \$1,000
	Sawing cost (1 day X 10 sawing ladies X \$100) \$1,000
* Aluminum boat and outboard engine	
	An aluminum boat \$25,000 or more
	Outboard engine (150 horse powers) \$9,000
	(70 to 125 horse powers) \$7,000
* Snowmobile (4 snowmobiles X \$7,000)	\$28,000
* Hunting Tools and Equipment	
	Shoulder Gun (2 X \$1,950) \$3,900
	Bombs for Shoulder Gun (5 bombs) \$1,000
	Darting Gun (2 X \$780) \$1,560
	Bombs for Darting Gun (5 bombs) \$ 1,000
	Harpoon heads with rope (2) \$110
	Floats (2) \$260
	Sleds (5) \$2,000
	Tent (1) \$200
	Camping Equipments (one set) \$3,000
	VHF Radio (2) \$580
* Gas	
	Gas for spring hunts \$7,000
	Gas for fall hunts (\$500 a day) \$5,000
* Food	
	Food for a spring whaling camp \$2,000
	Food for fall whale hunts: changeable due to number of hunting days

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ask their crew members to pay for some of them.

When a whaling captain becomes old, either he may stay in the community during whaling periods or engage in other types of hunting and fishing. Also, when he dies, his wife may take over his position as captain for a while.

There are about 55 registered whaling crews in Barrow. In addition to the household, the extended family, and the community, the crew is one of the important social units. The whaling captains form the Barrow Whaling Captains Association and their wives the Barrow Whaling Captains' Wife Association. As interest groups, these two associations have considerable political and social influence in Barrow.

#### 4.2 Spring Whaling and Fall Whaling

The Inupiat carry out spring whale hunts in open water or leads near edges of sea ice from mid-April to late-May. Around mid-April, about 35 to 45 crews make their own base camps at intervals of 50 to 100 meters on ice edges along the lead or open water. From the camp sites crew members watch for migrating whales. Although an adult bowhead whale reaches to about 18 m in length and weighs about 60 to 80 tons, the hunters prefer to target a young whale of about 10 meters in length, because its meat and *maktak* (skin parts with blubber) are much softer and tastier than those of larger ones.

After locating a whale of an appropriate size, the hunters approach it by *umiaq*. When within striking distance, one hunter harpoons the whale with a darting gun and then another shoots it with a shoulder gun. If they succeed in killing it, all the crews there will pray for it. Then they tow it to the sea ice where it is butchered with the help of other crews. Rather than an *umiaq*, boats with outboard engines are used to tow the whale. Once at the ice edge, many people cooperate to pull the whale onto the ice. Sometimes, this takes a long time, as, for example, on May 4, 2010 when more than 20 people and 5 snowmobiles took more than 2 hours to pull a whale onto the ice. After that the successful whaling crew butchers the whale, assisted by many helpers from other crews and the village.

If the quota for a given year is not fulfilled at the end of the spring whaling season, fall whaling will be conducted in that year, usually from the end of September until mid-October. The days are very short and the fall hunting grounds are far from Barrow, so a day's hunting trip is made and whales are towed back to a butchering site near Barrow by several cooperating boats. The hunting and sharing method in the fall is the same for the spring hunt.

#### 4.3 Butchering, Sharing and Distribution of Whale Products

Generally, a successful captain initiates the butchering of the whale by making three lines and then cutting X marks between them with a large cutting tool. The entire unit is called "*Tavsi*". Half the *Tavsi* is used the next day for a community feast at the successful captain's house, and the other half is the share of his crew. Several hunters from other whaling crews and other persons from town gradually come to participate in the butchering and to receive a division of the whale products as helpers. If any other crew hopes to receive a share from the hunting, it must send one or two members to the butchering site. Also, any villager who hopes to obtain some meat and *maktak* must

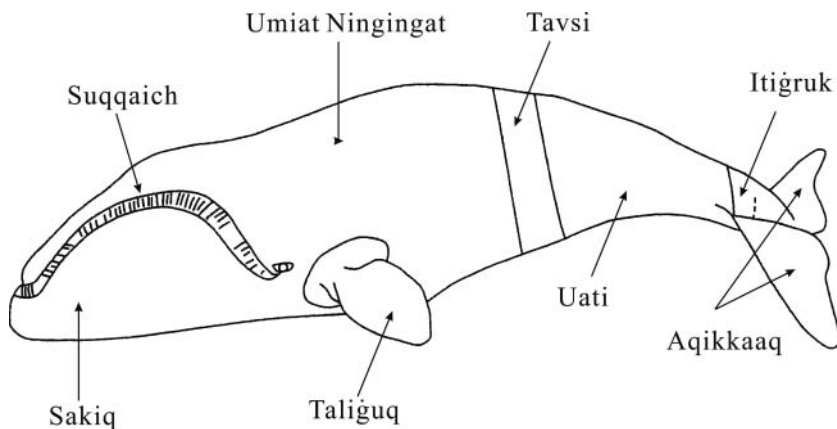


Figure 4 Whale distribution in Barrow (Source: North Slope Borough School District 2002)

voluntarily help in the butchering. Meat, *maktak*, internal organs, tongue, flippers, tail, baleen, and other parts are divided into shares for the captain's feast, the successful crew, other crews and people who helped in towing and butchering the whale, as well as for the community feasts of *Nalukataq*, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Four or five hunters cut the whale into parts, and about 20 people carry them to other spots. The successful whaling captain's wife with a few crew members' wives come to the butchering site to cook *maktak* and give some to the people there. It usually takes about 5 hours or more to complete the butchering. When finished, the successful crew returns the skull of the whale to the sea; the contemporary Inupiat believe that because a whale's soul resides in its skull, they should return it to the sea to ensure its rebirth.

After butchering has been completed, the meat and other parts are shared among the successful crew, other crews and several individual helpers, according to certain rules. Certain meat and other parts are brought back to the successful captain's house to be cooked by the successful crew members and their wives. The day after the successful hunt, a community feast is held at the captain's house. On the other hand, remaining meat and other parts after the sharing and the feast will be put in the captain's ice cellar. The butchering and sharing method during the spring hunts is the same as that for those in the fall.

The ways of butchering and sharing differ only slightly between whaling crews in Barrow, but substantially among crews from different villages (Kishigami 2012). The commonest method of distribution of a whale in Barrow is shown below (North Slope Borough School District 2002; see Figure 4).

- (1) *Tavsi*: Meat and *maktak* of 30 cm in width are divided into two. Half goes to the successful crew. This half is divided as personal shares among the crew, under the supervision of the whaling captain. The other half is cooked and served to the public at the captain's house the day after the successful hunt.
- (2) *Uati*: This is kept in the successful captain's ice cellar and is served at feasts such as *Nalukataq*, Christmas and Thanksgiving.
- (3) *Itigruk*: This part is kept in the successful captain's ice cellar and given to the visitors at *Nalukataq*.
- (4) *Aqikkaak*: This part is kept in the successful captain's ice cellar and served at feasts such as *Nalukataq*, Christmas and Thanksgiving.
- (5) *Umiat Ningingat* or *Ningik*: All whaling crews who participate in butchering the whale share this part equally. It should be noted that this part is equally divided among all the registered whaling crews in the first spring hunt.
- (6) *Suqqaich*: Half goes to all the crews who helped with the towing. The rest goes to the successful crew.
- (7) *Sakiq*: One side goes to the successful whaling captain and the other is divided among the crews who assisted in towing the whale.
- (8) *Taliguq*: One side goes to the harpooner and the other is used as "*taquun*" by all whaling crews at the butchering site.
- (9) *Utchik* (tongue): Half is divided among all crews at the butchering site. Approximately one quarter is served at the successful captain's feast and the

remainder at *Nalukataq*.

(10) *Uumman* (heart), *Ingaluaq* (intestine) and *Taqtu* (kidney): Half is served at the successful captain's feast. The remainder is served at *Nalukataq*.

When the butchering is completed, the successful captain makes a "go ahead" sign for anyone to cut and take from portions left for that purpose. This practice is called "*pilaniaq*".

This distribution system shows that the successful crew does not have exclusive ownership of most parts of the whale. According to Brower and Hepa (1998), 60% of whale parts goes to *Ningik* use, 10% to *Tavsi* use, and 30% to *Utai* use. The sharing rule ensures that the most parts of the whale are provided to other whaling crews who help in the towing and butchering and the whole community.

#### 4.4 Secondary Sharing and Distribution of a Whale

After the formal sharing at the butchering site, whale meat, *maktak* and other parts are further distributed to the entire community through the successful captain's feast, the feasts of *Apugauti*, *Nalukataq*, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and daily sharing and exchange practices.

##### 4.4.1 The Successful Captain's Feast after the Hunt

The day after the hunting and butchering of a whale the *nigipkai* feast is held for the whole community at the successful captain's house. Half of the whale meat and *maktak* of the *Tavsi* part, one quarter of the tongue, and half of the heart, intestine and kidney are cooked and provided to the community.

The successful whaling captain's crew flag is put on the roof of his house. All the crew members and their wives gather at the captain's house to prepare for the feast. They cut and boil the meat, *maktak* and other parts. Then the cooked parts are divided into two parts, one for the feast and the other for gifts. For each gift they put a portion of meat, *maktak*, tongue, heart, intestine and kidney, together with a piece of bread or Eskimo doughnut, into small vinyl bags. Also, they prepare boiled fruits, coffee and tea.

When the feast has been prepared, the captain announces that it is about to begin, after praying to God by radio. Villagers visit the captain's house by twos and threes. The wives of the captain and his crew members give a few food gift bags to each visitor, considering the size of the visitor's household. On the other hand, relatives of the captain and elders enjoy whale dishes at the captain's house and receive a few bags as a gift. Also, the captain or his crew members deliver these bags by car to elders and widows unable to visit the whaling captain's house for the feast.

After all the food bags have been distributed, the captain announces the end of the feast by radio and pulls his crew's flag off the roof. Through this feast, many residents, especially elders, widows and persons in need can partake of some culturally highly esteemed food.

##### 4.4.2 Feasts at *Apugauti*, *Nalukataq*, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Messenger Feast

After the end of the spring whaling season, *Apugauti* and *Nalukataq* are held by

successful whaling captains. When each successful whaling captain lands his *umiaq* at the end of his whaling season, he and his crew will host and carry out *Apugauti* independently from mid-May to mid-June. On the other hand, one crew, or several crews together will host and carry out *Nalukataq* from late-June to the end of June. These events are accompanied by community feasts.

Before the 1980s, whaling captains used not to hold *Apugauti* for a whole community, just for their own crews. However, since that time each successful whaling captain and crew host it for the whole community. The main dishes of this feast are *mikigaq* (fermented whale meat, blubber and blood), duck soup and goose soup. Also, pieces of bread, Eskimo doughnut, fruits, coffee and tea are provided to participants. On one occasion of the *Apugauti*, held in June, 2009, one whaling crew provided for the whole community 14 buckets of *mikigaq* (266 liters), 20 pots of goose soup, 20 pots of duck soup, 2,000 pieces of bread, 2,000 pieces of Eskimo doughnuts, 10 buckets of fruit stew (190 liters), 53 liters of tea, and 38 liters of coffee. This *Apugauti* was a rather large one. Usually, each whaling captain decides the scale of the *Apugauti* and quantity of dishes for it. While about 100 people participate in a small *Apugauti*, more than 400 people participate in a large *Apugauti*. Each participant can enjoy only one or two meals at a time. When the food is gone, the *Apugauti* is finished.

In an ordinary year, two to four *Nalulataqs* are held in Barrow from mid-June to the end of June. It is a day-long festival with a few feasts. On June 30, 2008, two whaling captains held *Nalukataq* together. At noon, their crews provided goose soup, duck soup, bread, tea and coffee to community people. At 3 o'clock, *mikigaq* was given to them. And frozen whale meat, frozen *maktak*, cakes, fruits, tea and coffee were served at 6 o'clock.

Each captain provides one third of the *Uati* and *Aqikkaaq*, a whole *Igruk*, half of the heart, intestines and kidneys, and one quarter of the tongue for the feast of *Nalukataq*. In each *Nalukataq*, more than 2,000 people participate. Each of them can receive one meal at noon, another at 15:00, and a third at 18:00, in addition to extra meat and other parts which will be brought back to his/her home. In this festival, blanket toss and traditional Inupiat drum dances are carried out by the host captains, crews and several other participants.

On Thanksgiving Day in November, and at Christmas in December, several churches in Barrow host feasts. The successful captains give about one third of *Uati* and *Aqikkaaq* to four churches on each occasion. Each successful captain provides meat and *maktak* to the churches that the Inupiat people attend, such as the Utiqiaġvik Presbyterian Church, the New Beginning Church, Assembly of God Church and Cornerstone Community Church.

Once every two years, the Messengers Feast (*kivġiq*) is held in Barrow, which was revitalized by elders in 1988. Many people from outside the community are invited to it (Ikuta 2007). Whaling captains and crews members provide food including whale meat and *maktak* for it. After country food is served to the participants by church volunteers, the remaining whale meat and *maktak* is shared equally among all of the participating households on each occasion.

Several kinds of feasts are held in Barrow more than 20 times a year. On each occasion, whale dishes are provided to a whole community by successful whaling captains and crews.

#### **4.4.3 Sharing of Whale Meat and *Maktak* within Barrow**

Whale meat and *maktak* are shared among a captain and his/her crew members, under the supervision of the captain. Also, the captain will give some meat and *maktak* as a share from *Tavsi* parts to several people who provide gas, food, cash, or equipment for the whale hunt. The meat and *maktak* are further shared or given to others, such as their parents, uncles and aunts, siblings, elders, widows, and needy persons. Also, some meat and *maktak* are given to families in which a member has died.

#### **4.4.4 Sharing and Exchange of Whale Meat and *Maktak* with People Living Outside Barrow**

Many siblings, cousins, children, nephews, nieces, and friends of the Inupiat in Barrow live in other villages, towns and cities, both in Alaska and throughout the USA. The Inupiat in Barrow communicate with each other by phone and/or e-mail. If their relatives or friends tell them they would like to have whale products, the Barrow people send them meat and *maktak*. During my research, people from Barrow sent whale meat and *maktak* to family, relatives, and friends in Nuiqsut, Atqasuq, Point Lay, Point Hope, Nome, Anaktuvuk Pass, Kotzebue, Noorvik, Fairbanks, Anchorage, and the states of Montana, Washington, Arizona, California, Hawaii, among others, by air cargo or other delivery services. In return, their family, relatives and friends in neighboring communities sent smelt or meat/*maktak* of beluga whale to them.

Barrow people also exchange local products with people in other communities whom they have met at various indigenous meetings. For example, an Inupiat man in Barrow sent about 20 kg of whale meat and *maktak* to a Yupiit man, and the latter sent dried salmon to the former. In this way, Barrow people often share and exchange local products with people in other places and/or with non-Inupiat people.

#### **4.4.5 Sale and Exchange of Whale Meat and *Maktak***

Edible parts of whales are not sold by the Inupiat, but are shared or distributed among them through rule-governed and voluntary sharing practices in Barrow. The Inupiat people do not attempt to profit monetarily from their activities. Rather, they use their own cash income to engage in their whaling activities.

There is one exception concerning the sale of whale products. Baleen can be sold in Barrow at \$35 for about 30 cm. However, many captains and hunters often simply give baleen parts to their family members, relatives and/or friends who make artistic items from it. These arts and crafts made of baleen or whale bone are sold to tourists.

#### **4.4.6 World View Concerning Whales and Whaling, and Its Changes**

A bowhead whale is a special entity to the coastal Inupiat people. The Inupiat believe that a whale has the capability to see and hear what is happening in human society from

far way. Also, that a whale gives itself to a whaling captain and his wife who are generous and kind both to other people and to the whale. As a whaling captain's wife is thought to attract whales, she plays a very important symbolic role in the whale hunt, attracting them for her husband's whaling crew (Bodenhorn 1990). Thus, whaling captains and their wives try to behave or speak properly so as not to threaten or bother whales. Also, they share their game with others and help those in trouble or need.

These ideas are still prevalent among the contemporary Inupiat in Barrow. However, they have another view on relationships between the Inupiat and whales under the long-standing influence of Christianity, which was introduced in this region around the 1890s (Burch 1994). Because the contemporary Inupiat believe that the Christian God sends whales to the Inupiat, they give their thanks to the God for their success in whaling. In other words, they thank whales indirectly via the God that gives them to the Inupiat. The current world view on the relationship between the Inupiat and whales is based on that among the Inupiat, God and whales. However, Inupiat whaling is still closely associated with their traditional world view (Kishigami 2009b).

## 5. Characteristics and Importance of Contemporary Whaling in Barrow

This paper has illustrated that the yearly cycle of Barrow Inupiat activities is primarily made up of preparation for whaling, whaling activities, and several feasts associated with whaling. In this final section, I highlight several features and the significance of contemporary whaling in Barrow.

First, whaling is not a commercial activity, but culturally highly-valued food acquisition carried out among the Inupiat in Barrow. Whaling captains and crew members use their income to carry out the whaling activities, but they are not able to make money from them because of their own tradition and IWC rules. To the Inupiat people, whaling itself is a culturally meaningful activity. While contemporary whaling activity of the Inupiat is sacred, it also has an aspect that incorporates festivals, which touches their heart and gives them immeasurable excitement and pleasure.

Second, whaling is only a means to provide culturally high-valued food such as whale meat, *maktak*, etc., for the whole Inupiat community in Barrow. Although they obtain a large quantity of meat and *maktak* from their whaling activities, they cannot depend on whales as staple food in terms of quantity. However, the whale meat and *maktak* are culturally significant to the Inupiat as their symbolic food. Also, to share and eat whale dishes together in the community is one of the greatest concerns among the Inupiat.

Third, the Inupiat can reproduce their ethnic and community identities through participation in whaling activities and community-wide feasts in Barrow. Whaling is a distinctive and historically long-standing activity of the Inupiat and an important basis of their ethnic identity. Also, to share and eat the whale products together in community feasts may reproduce their "we" feeling.

Fourth, distinctive Inupiat social relationships can be reproduced through the whaling, sharing and feasting. Because these activities are socially organized on the basis



of crew, extended family, and other relationships, they reconfirm, maintain or/and reproduce those relationships through whaling activities.

Fifth, whaling and sharing are closely related to the Inupiat's world view on relationships between the Inupiat and bowhead whales. Although the world's view on them has been partly changed under the influence of Christianity, it has had a strong influence on their whaling and sharing activities. Also, only through whaling and sharing, the relationships between the Inupiat and whales can be reproduced.

Sixth, the whaling and hosting of community feasts give social prestige and fame to successful captains and their wives and crews. Although the contemporary Inupiat whalers are not able to accumulate wealth through whaling activities, successful whalers can gain social prestige through them within the community. Thus, many Barrow children and young people hope to become whaling captains or good hunters.

Seventh, whaling is an ethnic symbol or marker. Bowhead whale hunts and the associated feasts are unique to the Inupiat and Yupiit in Alaska. Because of the distinctiveness of the activities, whaling can be used as an ethnic symbol to distinguish them from other peoples or the majority society. In indigenous politics, whaling can be a political resource.

Eighth, whale meat and *maktak* are an important and nutritious food. Although whale meat and *maktak* are not daily foods, but rather special food among the Inupiat, they are highly nutritious and can contribute to promoting good health among the Inupiat (Raynolds III et al 2006).

In sum, the whaling activities and feasts are culturally, socially, spiritually, politically, and nutritionally important in contemporary Inupiat society. They also form a basis for their ethnic and community identities. The recent climate warming and anti-whaling movements by the environmental NGOs groups and animal rights NGOs activists are influencing negatively indigenous whaling, such as that carried out by the Inupiat (Kishigami 2009a; 2010). However, this paper shows how whaling and associated feasts of the Inupiat are inseparably related to their contemporary way of life. Thus, the whaling tradition of the Inupiat is fundamental for the cultural and social continuation of the Inupiat as a people.

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